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ABSTRACT

Using findings of exemplary precedents in other countries for what another country hopes to emulate or avoid is a common practice in policy discourse. This paper argues that recent British moves toward greater choice and diversity in secondary education should neither be prematurely judged as successful within their own context nor applied "straight across the board" to the different political, cultural and educational conditions of the United States. In the United Kingdom, it is argued, the hierarchy of schools that are stratified by status and funding has led to severe reduction in choice for many already disadvantaged parents rather than the comprehensive empowerment which a market is supposed to produce. The paper outlines the British "new framework for schools," with a focus on the diversifying of secondary education, drawing on research into two policy initiatives--the Assisted Places Scheme and the pilot program of City Technology Colleges (CTCs). Outcomes of these two initiatives show that diversity is being encouraged and that consumer preference is being reinforced in a system still dominated by a traditional academic model of "good" secondary education. Such a model is exemplified by a school with high examination results and market appeal. The paper next looks at the demand side and considers some factors of parent choice and differences in parents' chances of having their preferences accepted. It is expected that the reforms will result in an increase in educational inequalities and social polarization. Some proposals for safeguards are offered. These include encouraging schools to develop distinctive characteristics and involving teachers and older pupils in making decisions which are not necessarily tied to parental preferences. Contains 46 references. (LMI)

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CHOICE IN ENGLISH SECONDARY EDUCATION: LESSONS FOR AMERICA?

TONY EDWARDS (University of Newcastle upon Tyne) and
GEOFF WHITTY (University of London)

Paper presented at the symposium 'Lessons in school reform from Great Britain', American Educational Research Association annual conference, New Orleans, 6 April 1994.

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Salutary lessons for American education have been taken by John Chubb and Terry Moe (1992) from the radical school reforms being implemented in Britain since 1987. Indeed, their instructional text was originally published in Britain shortly before the 1992 Election not only as a piece of 'policy borrowing' but as exhortation that the Conservatives should be more radical still if they were re-elected (*Sunday Times* 9 February, pp.18-36). Finding exemplary precedents in other countries for what it is hoped to emulate or avoid in one's own is a common practice in policy discourse. It has obvious attractions. 'If it works there, it can work here' may seem to provide the benefits of multi-site trials without the labour of undertaking and evaluating them. Thus the Netherlands has been taken by the radical Right in Britain as a prime example of state support for minority groups to create and maintain their 'own' schools in recognition of parents' right to contain their children's education within their own cultural or religious frame of reference (Hillgate Group 1987), and the 'success' of Magnet schools is cited to demonstrate how a specialised curriculum can recruit across boundaries of race and class (Taylor 1990). Apparently parallel developments in several countries can be used as evidence of deep economic, technological or social changes which are seen as irresistibly driving educational reform towards creating 'new schools for new times' (Whitty et al 1994: 159-181). And since the replacement of public 'monopolies' by markets or quasi-markets has been so pervasive a policy shift, it is easy to see substantial ideological similarities underlying apparent convergences in educational policy.

Yet education systems have particular structures and particular assumptions about access and outcome which are deeply embedded in their time and place. As Halpin and Troyna argue in their introduction to this symposium, 'fine-grain detail of their implementation' is necessary before reforms in one context can be used as models for policy-making in another. That detail is more likely to throw doubt on their transportability than to indicate specific lessons to be learned. Thus closer study of apparently similar initiatives may show them to be very different - for example, magnet schools and city technology colleges, Charter schools and grant-maintained schools, the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program and the Assisted Places Scheme. Even a 'common' ideology itself may begin to crack as analysis highlights (for example) the peculiarly British influence on educational policy of 'cultural restorationists' committed to academic selection and traditional learning (Ball 1993a). Most obviously, the 'same' developments may appear

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very differently from different vantage points, as in the contrasting 'lessons' drawn by British observers from American experience of 'freeing' parents' choice of school. In an anticipatory return of compliment, David Green (1991) draws on Chubb and Moe in arguing for the deregulation of educational supply, and cites Minnesota and East Harlem as evidence of its effectiveness. David Miliband (1991: 21) cites the managing of school placements in Cambridge Massachusetts as a demonstration of the power of 'controlled parental choice' to reconcile parental preferences with the public goal of 'voluntary' desegregation. And the National Commission on Education (1993: 185) selects the Carnegie Foundation's (1992) study of school choice to justify its comment that such evidence from abroad 'makes it absolutely clear that relaxing constraints on choice' can have the 'unacceptable consequence' of increasing unequal opportunities in a steeply-tiered system.

Although we began with some attractions of policy-borrowing, it is with its perils that this symposium is mainly concerned. And since exemplary warnings are open to the same objections as uncritically favourable precedents, the lessons from Britain should not take the over-simple form of asserting that 'if it is failing here, it will fail there'. Our argument is that recent British moves towards greater 'choice and diversity' in secondary education should neither be judged a success prematurely within their own context, nor applied 'straight across the board' to the significantly different political, cultural and educational conditions of the United States (Chubb and Moe 1992: 49-50). Our analysis of the new 'framework for schools' being constructed in Britain (or more accurately in England) began as a contribution to an international Workshop on 'school autonomy and choice' held at Tel-Aviv University in June 1993, and has been modified in response to discussions during those three days. Since the participants included Israeli administrators as well as academics and was partly sponsored by the Ministry of Education, some useful lessons were presumably expected. And although a distinction was made in the final session between the normal (by descending angel) and the miraculous (by foreign 'expert') ways of reforming Israel's education system, the presence of outside (mainly American) academics indicated a confidence in the relevance to Israel of some of their different professional and research experience. Rightly, the Workshop was not an occasion for exchanging blunt arguments for and against choice. Its main theme was that any predictions about the effects of breaking the 'public monopoly' of educational supply must take into account the different ways and the different conditions in which that happens. 'Choice' can too easily be used as a 'trumping move' which excludes objective assessment by taking refuge in moral claims which are treated as being beyond question (Jonathan 1993), and then by dismissing any questioning of its benefits as unreformed paternalism or a seriously under-developed appreciation of the right of parents to decide their own children's schooling. Although there were instances of such trumping during the Workshop, one of its main themes was the possibility that greater choice might further disadvantage those most in need of high quality schooling. As Charles Glenn warned, 'a deliberate effort to the contrary' is needed if 'free' parental choice of school is not to

produce greater social segregation and still more unequal educational opportunity.

In our own questioning of how choice in being implemented in English conditions, we argued that what is being promoted in the UK is a hierarchy of types of school sharply stratified in status and funding, the outcome of which will be a severe reduction in choice for many already disadvantaged parents rather than that comprehensive empowerment which a market is supposed to produce. Our doubts about the effects of 'freeing' choice in English conditions is not that working-class or any other category of parents are poor choosers, or that Public Authority knows what is best for them, but that it is happening in an increasingly competitive market which is dominated by a particular model of 'good' secondary education and in which the penalties of under-enrolment are immediate and can be severe. That model is clearly reflected in the structure of the National Curriculum, and in the local 'league tables' of schools' examination results at age 16 and 18 which it is now obligatory to publish. Schools which diverge significantly from the dominant model, whether in 'standards' or in curriculum orientation, thereby reduce their chances of being chosen. And pupils unlikely to contribute to the good results and market appeal of a 'successful' and so over-chosen school have reduced chances of being admitted to it. Much generalised advocacy of a market in education assumes that freeing choice both requires and promotes diversity of provision, 'different but equal' versions of a good education preventing an excessive concentration of demand and the severe competition for entry arising from it. In the English education system, those conditions are not met. Whereas the Conservative Government claims to be promoting 'specialization' without 'selection', defining the first as choice by parents and the second as choice by schools, we see them as inseparably linked in current socio-cultural conditions.

In the next section of the paper, we outline the 'new framework for schools' which the Government has been constructing and which has greater choice and greater diversity as its central planks (Department for Education 1992). We concentrate on the diversifying of secondary education, drawing initially on our research into the two policy initiatives - the Assisted Places Scheme introduced in 1981 and the 'pilot programme' of city technology colleges announced in 1986 - which the the 1992 Government *White Paper* identified as the first significant steps twoards reforming the system.

1. A stratified diversity

The Assisted Places Scheme announced in May 1979 owed much more to a traditional commitment to building 'ladders of opportunity' for deserving individuals than to radical-Right support for consumer choice. Although the prominent role of Stuart Sexton in its promotion hinted at that second agenda, it is hard to see the Scheme as one of those 'incremental steps' towards a system composed entirely of 'self-governing schools obliged for survival to respond to the market' which Sexton later described as the New Right strategy's for achieving that aim without incurring the controversy

which vouchers would have aroused (Sexton 1987:8-10). It enables 'able children from less well-off homes' to attend independent schools otherwise beyond their reach because the Government pays all or part of their fees. The schools to which a certain number of these 'assisted' places have been allocated on a contract basis have had to meet the conventional criteria of academically 'excellent' secondary schools - namely, a high proportion of pupils staying to the age of 18, a wide range of academic subjects taught at that 'sixth form' stage, high success rates in the Advanced-level examinations, and a high proportion going on to university. It is for the parent to apply to the school of his or her choice, and for the school (once financial eligibility for assistance is established) to admit or reject the applicant; government's role is confined to confirming the quota of places, repaying the school for all remitted fees, and monitoring the Scheme nationally with a very light touch even where the proportion of a school's pupils receiving such assistance may be as high as 40% of its roll.

The Scheme resembles the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program in subsidising access to private education for 'poor' parents (Edwards et al 1989: Witte 1993). But among the many more differences than similarities between them is the restriction of assisted places to children who meet the entry requirements of academically-selective schools. Extending choice only for parents fortunate enough to have an able child and a school offering places within travelling distance (government assistance with the costs of boarding having been refused despite persistent requests from that part of the private sector), the Scheme's scope is too limited to appeal to the neo-liberal Right. Far from being an 'incremental' step towards greater diversity of supply, its main systemic effect was to reinforce both an already entrenched model of 'superior' secondary education and the private sector's claim of a causal connection between independence and academic excellence as traditionally defined. When Chubb and Moe (1990, 55) refer to the relative freedom of American private schools to 'find a specialized segment of the market to which they can appeal', they are describing a far more differentiated sector than in England. Although a few English private schools have provided escape routes for cultural and religious dissenters and occasional educational experiments, the appeal of its leading schools has depended heavily on high success rates in public examinations, high entry rates to universities (especially Oxford and Cambridge), and consequently enhanced chances of entry to high status occupations (Whitty et al 1989). For schools like these, the Assisted Places Scheme has represented a significant public subsidy by enabling them to select more of their entry on academic merit unconstrained by fee-paying capacity and so enhance the indicators critical to their market appeal (Edwards et al 1989). More generally the Scheme has reinforced assumptions about the general excellence of independent schools, its rhetoric of legitimation giving most prominence to the restoration of educational opportunity otherwise denied to many able children by the progressive decline in standards attributed, especially in the inner-cities, to comprehensive schools. Even in its own terms therefore, it only extended access to an established form of schooling. Indeed, by defining educational opportunity in such overtly traditional terms, it reinforced the equally

traditional difficulty of establishing alternative versions of secondary education as being anything other than second best. Indeed, and despite the priavate sector's formal exemption from its requirements, the shaping of a National Curriculum has been considerably influenced by pressure from it to maintain or enhance its traditional academic bias. As the former Chief Executive of the National Curriculum Council has remarked, the power of the private sector lobby to influence public education was frequently evident 'in the willingness of the Secretary of State to listen to it' (Graham 1993: 64).

It is ironic that its introduction almost coincided with a government intervention in the curriculum which, unprecedented in its scale, was directed at promoting a more modern, vocationally relevant alternative suitable for children of all abilities. It reflected the 'modernising' tendency then prominent, to be curtailed more recently by Right-wing adherence to tradition and 'cultural restoration' (Ball 1983a). In this Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) announced in 1982, Local Authorities were invited to bid for contracts to develop for pupils aged 14-18 a 'distinct curriculum' more suited in content and methods of learning to the needs of a modern economy. To some advocates of reform, the announcement of City Technology Colleges four years later was a logical next step, turning a distinct strand within the curriculum into an orientation for a new kind of school (Regan 1990). CTCs were to offer a curriculum weighted towards science and technology and, no less overtly, towards working life and the enterprise culture ; they were to do so in urban, mainly inner-city, areas where existing provision was most likely to be poor and where parents were least likely to have any effective educational choice (Department of Education, 1986). From a curriculum perspective, they can be seen as a concentrated effort by government to promote 'technical' education from its habitually inferior status through the appeal of modern buildings, conspicuously enhanced provision for information technology, and vigorous publicising of a 'new kind of school'.

This is certainly how the CTCs have advertised themselves, 'a school of tomorrow for the children of today' being a typical prospectus example. But in practice, matters are more complicated. CTCs have been given an apparent license to be innovative. This is why those working in them perceive obligations to exemplify how IT can be used to produce a 'shift from teaching to learning', and to challenge the traditional mould of a narrow, academic post-16 curriculum (Whitty et al 1993, chapter 5). The high level of applications to most CTCs might be taken as evidence of parental demand for something new, but our own interviews with parents indicated a mixture of motives in which the attractions of a high-technology environment or other modern features were not conspicuous. Much more influential seemed to be a belief that CTCs are selective, albeit using non-traditional criteria of suitability; are generally better resourced; and are more likely to uphold traditional values and discipline (Whitty et al 1993, chapter 4: Gewirtz et al 1992). We therefore see these schools as facing a dilemma, because their overt commitment to being modern and technological may not be helpful to their ambition of becoming 'beacons of excellence' if excellence continues to

be defined traditionally. They may therefore be tempted, as Walford and Miller (1991) suggest, to move up the traditional hierarchy of esteem by emphasizing other selling points. Certainly their promotion as schools offering 'a good educational with vocational relevance' (CTC Trust 1991) seems a risky marketing exercise, given the connotations of the 'vocational' as suitable for those not capable of coping with the 'academic'.

If parents are not obviously won over by the 'appeal of the new', there are also reasons to doubt the Government's commitment to CTCs as centres of *educational* innovation, and grounds for seeing in their development something of an educationist take-over of a highly politicized initiative (Whitty et al 1993). The main political objective of the pilot programme, announced at the 1986 Conservative Party Annual Conference, was to break the 'public monopoly' of educational supply by creating a new category of school which, receiving some of its capital funding from private sponsors and all its recurrent funding directly from central government, would be outside the control of any Local Authority and so enabled to demonstrate the differences made possible by that autonomy. But from a market perspective, the initiative is open to the objection of being too interventionist. While it is an 'anti-system reform ' in so far as it loosens the Local Authority grip on supply, it is no help in showing how new schools can emerge 'of their own accord' (Chubb and Moe 1992, 28). Certainly the CTC remit was firmly defined in advanced, and potential parents were explicitly warned that the curriculum would be (for that pre-National Curriculum time) unusually prescribed (DES 1986, 5). It was unsurprising then that the initiative's main political architects had different purposes. Bob Dunn, the Schools Minister, saw it as filling a curriculum gap and providing a choice of 'being educated in the new technology'. Kenneth Baker, then Secretary of State, saw it as bridging an unacceptably large gulf between private schools and the 'huge continent of state education ', and as 'injecting points of creative energy' into a system plagued by institutionalised inertia. Stuart Sexton, political adviser to Baker's predecessors, regarded 'technology' as a usefully fashionable gloss on what really mattered - the move towards self-governing schools free to respond to the market (Whitty et al 1993: 20-22).

The ideological dilemma posed by trying to create consumer demand for a technologically-oriented curriculum particuthrough government intervention, and the apparent priority given by government to diminishing the role of Local Authorities in educational supply, are both evident in the contrast between two subsequent measures to modernise the secondary curriculum. The Government's*Technology Schools Initiative*, which provided with extra funding for technological and vocational courses, was biassed towards grant-maintained schools [see below] but did not exclude those still maintained through their Local Authorities. Two years later, the Government's invitation to schools to seek the status and extra funding of being designated*Technology Colleges* and specialising in providing 'an educational culture which is scientific, technological and vocational' was restricted to schools which are either not fully under LEA because they are voluntary-aided church schools or have opted-out of LEA control

(Department for Education 1993). The spurious justification offered for that restriction is that the industrial and business sponsors to be actively involved in funding and running the 'colleges' want the freedom of action which comes with having a school of their own; yet major companies have refused to sponsors CTCs and expressed dislike of this later initiative on the opposite grounds that they prefer to work with Local Authorities and to spread their sponsorship widely. The real purpose behind the restriction is to continue the strategy of offering financial inducements to schools to 'break out' from Local Authority 'control'.

The most extensive embodiment of that strategy lies in the arrangements through which parents can exercise a collective 'voice' by voting their school out of that control and making it 'self-governing' with its money provided from central government. At the time of the 1988 Act, it was unclear whether this new status was intended primarily as a sponsored escape route from 'left-wing' LEAs, as a means of creating a privileged segment within the public sector, or as a model for the entire system. In the 1993 Education Act, however, that last aim is explicit and the grant-maintained schools programme and its supposedly galvanising effects of educational provision dominate the legislation. Grant-maintained schools are more obviously exposed to market forces than those which remain within their LEAs. They lack any LEA safety net in the event of difficulties over recruitment or funding. They control their own admissions policies, subject to the approval of a Secretary of State currently inclined to favour greater diversity and a measure of selectiveness. They therefore have scope to advertise some special quality and recruit on that basis which was greatly enhanced when the Government dropped in 1991 its initial government prohibition on changing the 'character' of a school within five years of changing its status. Numbering by December 1993 about 10% of secondary schools eligible to 'opt-out', they constitute the spearhead of government hopes for greater diversity though specialisation. Given freedom and encouragement to engage in niche marketing, are they already showing greater responsiveness to market demand and to displaying their distinctivness?

Briefly, because the question is the focus of the paper by John Fitz and Sally Power, a high proportion of the first hundred schools to obtain grant-maintained status were seeking not to change but to resist such changes as becoming non-selective, co-educational, losing their sixth form, being merged with another school, or being closed. A high proportion of academically selective and single-sex schools compared with the public sector generally gave an initially traditional image to this new category of schools. The wish for greater autonomy which seems to lie behind a high proportion of more recent ballots may contain a wish to reshape the character of the school. But the evidence so far is that while these schools put more effort into marketing themselves, the tendency is to emphasize 'traditional' discipline and ethos, and high success rates in the key academic subjects examined at 16 and 18. Far from being centres of innovation in the manner of city technology colleges, grant-maintained schools are so far associated more readily with 'preservation' (Fitz et al 1993: 85).

The Government's hope is that all or almost all secondary schools will have become grant-maintained by 1997. The large majority which currently remain within their Local Authorities, however, are hardly less exposed to the benefits and risks of competition by the progressive ending of 'captive' intakes and the tying of progressively higher proportions of schools' delegated budgets to pupil numbers. With the unavoidable exception of single schools serving scattered populations, the government's objective has been to disrupt any notion of a 'catchment area' and to privilege the individual consumer over traditional ties of locality and community. As he reports in this symposium, Stephen Ball and his colleagues have been investigating the effects on schools of exposure to market forces. Their evidence indicates persistent strong doubts about the appropriateness of a market approach to education, unease about subordinating professional judgement to perceptions of consumer demand, and ambivalence about establishing too sharp a competivive edge over neighbouring schools especially when these 'belong' to the same LEA and so share the political space which the government is striving to deregulate (Bowe and Ball 1992: see also Woods 1992).

Government promotion of diversity has coincided with its imposition on all maintained schools - including CTCs and those which become grant-maintained - of statutory obligations to teach a National Curriculum unique internationally in combining a long list of 'foundation' subjects with detailed prescription and national testing of what should be learned under the various subject headings. The apparent contradiction between deregulating the supply side while specifying what must be supplied is explicable as an initially necessary condition for school autonomy, that autonomy needing to be exercised within nationallly defined curriculum limits, and a necessary mechanism for informing consumers by enabling schools to be compared against common standards of performance. Yet the National Curriculum has been strongly criticized from the Right - in principle as being incompatible with a proper belief in letting the market decide, and in practice as being so extensive and so prescriptive in detail as to crowd out experiment and innovation (Sexton 1988 and 1992: Centre for Policy Studies 1988: O'Hear 1991). The egalitarian potential of raising the threshold of common knowledge and understanding to which children should have access 'wherever they live and go to school', an objective highlighted in early government publicity, is also perceived from the Right as pandering to 'the cravings of Procrustians...dedicated to the meanly repressive ideal of ensuring that all should reach and none should exceed a universal, uniform and hence supposedly divisive mediocrity' (Flew 1991, 44).

In its initial specifications, the National Curriculum certainly imposed heavy constraints on curriculum innovation and so on consumer choice. Independent schools were exempt from its statutory requirements, though Ministers repeatedly expressed the hope that they would work to them. It was expected that CTCs would be excluded from the full weight of those requirements, but the funding agreement drawn up between the government

and each CTC tied it to them as firmly as any maintained school and forced any 'added-value' in science and technology to be provided through a longer working day and working year and the curriculum 'extensions' and 'enrichment' which these made room for. The 1988 Act gave the Secretary of State power to waive some National Curriculum targets in the interests of 'experiment' , and there had been speculation that grant-maintained schools might be given a general exemption to encourage them to specialize. The necessity for such privileged latitude is now being removed by a reduction in Curriculum requirements which will 'free' the equivalent of two days a week through the last years of compulsory schooling for 'vocational' studies or, if a school wished, for reinforcing a general academic bias or highlighting some part of its curriculum. It remains to be seen what use will be made of this accommodation both to professional demands for less weighty central prescription and ideological objections to excessive constraints on the 'free' interplay of supply and demand.

2. The freeing of consumer choice?

The 1988 Reform Act included what might be called 'citizen rights' to a 'broad and balanced education' alongside its various measures to end the Local Authority 'monopoly. The 1993 Act is dominated by the concept of parents as consumers exercising choice in an increasingly diversified and competitive educational market, and the National Curriculum is almost unmentioned. In the previous section, we argued that diversity is being encouraged and consumer preference is being reinforced in a system still dominated by a traditional academic model of 'good' secondary education. We now turn back to the demand side. We consider briefly some of the factors which seem to influence parental choice and then, in more detail, differences in parents' chances of having their preferences accepted.

As portrayed by market advocates, 'good' parents with several schools within reach are active choosers. They weigh the alternatives, seek reliable information about them, then calculate what is in the best interests of the child and make the relevant application. Evidence from Scotland, where school enrolment was opened up earlier than in England, indicates that only a small minority of parents actively chose against the 'obvious' local school and even fewer consider more than two alternatives (Adler et al 1989). In England, where choice is supposedly being delocalised, proximity to the home remains the most potent influence, deriving its influence not only from the obvious convenience but from a sense of community and from deference to the child's wish to go where his or her friends go (Edwards et al 1989, chapter 8; Hunter 1991: West et al 1993). Where this evidence is accepted by market advocates, they may dismiss it as no more than the persistence of inertia selling among parents still more accustomed to the allocation of school places than making a choice, and as a consequence of that lack of real differences between schools for which they blame the 'public monopoly' now being dismantled. Yet the development of such real differences in response to consumer demand is uncertain. It is true that other and more general considerations than a school's academic performance figure prominently in

parental choice, which suggests that there is scope for schools to market (for example) 'happiness' and a distinctively 'humane' environment (Echols et al 1991: Coldron and Boulton 1991). But where a 'better education' and consequently better prospects have appear to have been decisive, that judgement is more likely to be based on the school's aggregate results, and on an established but not necessarily still deserved reputatioon, than on detailed enquiry into what might the expected achievements be for a child like their own (Edwards et al 1989, 184-213: Smith and Tomlinson 1989). The evidence most relevant to our argument here is that schools judged to be good academically are likely to have been academically selective in the past even when formally non-selective now, and to have socially advantaged intakes; conversely, 'poor' schools are likely to be in areas of high unemployment and high levels of social disadvantage, and to have been non-selective throughout their history (Adler 1993a). It follows then that schools risk or benefit from being judged on grounds which are essentially outside their control.

If schools are unequally placed to be chosen, m,any parents are unequally placed to be accepted by the school of their choice - or the school they would have chosen if they had thought there was any likelihood of access. It is at this point that the two strands of our analysis come together. It was among the principal claims in the 1992 Government *White Paper* that specialization need not entail selection. Even where selection occurred, the Government argued, it would be 'parent-driven' . The encouragement now being given to schools to 'play to their strengths' would 'gear' educational provision to 'local circumstances and individual needs' through the interplay of supply and demand and to the benefit of all. In the rest of this paper, we outline the stratification of supply and demand which is the more likely outcome of present policies. For as even the Government's *Parent's Charter* - 'You have a right to a place in the school you want, unless it is full to capacity with pupils who have a stronger claim'.

The optimistic alternative was defined by Charles Glenn, in the Tel-Aviv Workshop referred to earlier, as 'every school a school of choice'. That seems to us to rest on assumptions untenable in the conditions we have described. It assumes a diversity in educational provision in which supply roughly matches demand, and in which an excess of demand for a particular form of education will lead either to its expansion or to the devising of acceptable alternatives. If that fails to happen, then some choices will be denied and it is the supplier who chooses between competing customers. There will be no convenient matching of specialized supply with specialized demand where parents do not see the alternatives as being 'different but equal', where a particular model exerts a pervasive influence, and where competition for access to it is intense. In the very unequally specialized market which is English secondary education, some producers and some consumers will 'search each other out in a progressive segmentation of the market' (Ranson 1993). Many consumers will search but not be found, and over-chosen schools are more likely to become selective than to expand.

Recognising that an over-subscribed school must select, and will prefer applicants who demonstrate 'a greater ability and aptitude to learn what it teaches', Stuart Sexton (1992,15) argues that less popular schools will then seek to emulate whatever it is which seems to give their more successful competitor its appeal. But whereas he sees schools becoming selective in relation to different abilities and aptitudes, that is by diverging rather than simply imitating, we see successful schools as being identified largely by their conformity to the predominant academic model and to the evidence of their success which is provided by the 'league tables' we mentioned earlier. Any secondary school is now entitled, with the agreement of its LEA or if a grant-maintained school of the Department for Education, to modify the comprehensiveness of its intake by selecting up to 10% on a basis of special 'ability or aptitude' in (for example) technology, music, drama, art or sport. It may also seek permission to select a much higher proportion. The indications so far are of schools wishing to be at least partly selective on grounds of 'general' rather than 'specialized'abilities, thouigh there are also indications in places of some specialisms being used as surrogates in a process of social selection.

If there is little evidence as yet of schools seeking to compete by becoming different, there is even less evidence of the market functioning as a 'self-correcting mechanism' (Adler 1993a). In theory, the fact or the threat of losing custom will concentrate a school's attention on becoming better or else on developing some specialized appeal. In practice, a reputation for 'failure' is not easily or quickly remedied, and a loss of intake has immediate effects on resources large enough to carry the risk a cumulative decline. Yet the very high correlations between examination results and pupils' prior levels of attainment before that stage of their education began, and between those results and 'social background', make it certain that the 'better' schools will be schools advantaged by their intakes (Willms and Echols 1992). Since those correlations are known broadly to schools, as is the power of 'composition effects', then 'successful' schools are likely to use their strong market position to become more selective rather than to expand, thereby increasing the disadvantage of their less successful competitors.

Such selection may be overt or covert. For example, and despite protests from within the CTC 'movement' at the illogicality of placing such an exceptional constraint on schools with a particular obligation to be enterprising, CTCs are still required to recruit intakes 'representative' in ability, ethnicity and 'class' of the area they serve. But while the statistical quotas may be met, the pupils within them may be very untypical in (for example) ambition and parental support of the categories to which they 'belong', and the interviewing of both applicants and parents has been an important part of CTC selection procedures (Whitty et al 1993, chapter 4). Most grant-maintained comprehensive schools have denied any intention of becoming fully or largely selective, yet a third of the first hundred GM schools were using Primary school reports and/or pupil and parent interviews to be at least covertly selective. The study from which that statistic is drawn concluded that the creation of a 'two-tier system' of chosen and

unchosen schools is being facilitated by the grant-maintained school programme (Bush et al 1993). It seems clear that grant-maintained schools are disproportionately represented among those comprehensive schools which are already taking or intending to take a third or even a half of their intake through some form of selection, and two have become fully selective after attaining that status (one, in Penrith in Cumbria, against very strong local opposition). Some over-chosen maintained schools are also tempted by their popularity to look beyond the usual factors of residence, attendance at a 'feeder' school or having an older sibling already a pupil to screen their intakes. In these circumstances, the process of selection is likely to be by academic aptitude and indirectly by social background. The outcome will be a disproportionate presence of socially advantaged children in the most 'successful' schools as both cause and effect, and of socially disadvantaged children in schools perceived as 'failing'.

That situation is not new. What is new is a policy of promoting differences between schools and types of school, in status and in resources, on the grounds that these differences are deserved. An inherent tendency to equalize value for money is sometimes attributed to an open market, which is also portrayed as working educationally to the advantage of low-income families because of the concentration in the areas where they live of 'poor' schools previously protected against the consequences of their failure. Our own conclusion is closer to that of a major Scottish study of the operation of parental choice, that while individual parents exercising choice tended to boost their children's achievement, the accumulated effect of individuals' choosing is likely to increase educational inequalities and social polarisation (Adler et al 1989, 208; Adler 1993a). The whole emphasis of government policy has been on providing escape routes for the 'deserving', and on the avoidance or extinction of 'poor' schools rather than their improvement. Charles Glenn reported in the Tel-Aviv Workshop on the Massachusetts practice of linking choice policies with public support for schools initially failing to attract sufficient students to be fully viable. No such constructive support is envisaged by the British Government, which has also deliberately undermined the capacity of Local Authorities to provide it. This is part of its strong preference for consumer rights of 'exit' over parental 'voice' - for consumer votes cast in the anonymity of the market over the individual and collective expression of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with schools. But if rights of entry to privileged forms of schooling are very unequally distributed and the aggregate effect of individual choices is greatly to extend the hierarchy of schools by penalising those which are under-subscribed, then it is schools in the most socially disadvantaged areas which are the likely losers.

On present evidence, we regard that as the predictable outcome of present policies. Like Raymond Plant, we reject the claim that a market cannot operate unjustly because its outcomes are both unintended and unforeseeable for individuals; if it is foreseeable that those already disadvantaged are likely to be further disadvantaged by a particular form of market provision, 'then we can be held to bear collective responsibility for the outcomes

.....[especially] when the outcomes are capable of being altered' (Plant 1990: 17-19). Chubb and Moe argue that equality is better 'protected' by markets than by political institutions, though they concede that choice of school cannot be unlimited and should not be unregulated. Our concern about the implementation of choice in England is that far too much is being left to the market, to be determined by the self-interest of some consumers and the competitive advantages of some schools. Arguing for a 'better balance between the rights of parents to choose schools for their children and the duties of education authorities to promote the education of all children', Adler (1993a; 1993b) suggests some revisions to current policies which would take choice seriously but avoid the most unacceptable consequences of recent legislation. His proposals include retaining for Education Authorities a responsibility for formulating admissions policies for all local schools; encouraging schools to develop distinctive characteristics; requiring positive choices on behalf of all children and not only the children of 'active choosers'; involving teachers and older pupils in making decisions which are not necessarily tied to parental preferences; and giving priority in over-subscribed schools to the applicants who are most strongly supported. Such proposals represent a reassertion of citizen rights alongside consumer rights (Edwards and Whitty 1994).

Similar safeguards are likely to be important elsewhere. A forthcoming OECD study of choice policies in England, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden and the United States concludes that where there is a dominant model of schooling, choice is as likely to reinforce hierarchies as to improve educational opportunities and the quality of schooling. It is also argued that demand pressures are rarely enough to produce real diversity of provision, so that positive initiatives are necessary to create real choice. To avoid reinforcing tendencies towards academic and social selection, popular schools need capital resources to expand and disadvantaged groups need better information, better transport, and perhaps privileged access to certain schools (Hirsch, forthcoming).

There seems to us to have been a greater concern to balance freedom of choice with social justice in some of the choice policies being tried out in the United States than in the British Government's promotion of 'choice and diversity'. In the relative absence of that concern, other countries should be wary of the 'lessons' to be learned from British school reform. What is clear from the British case is that however appealing the rhetoric of choice may be, it is prone to 'dangerous idealisations' (Ball 1993b). How choice policies operate, and their social effects, will be highly dependent on the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which they are introduced. The British Government was being at best disingenuous in asserting that in the contexts of late twentieth-century Britain, greater choice would bring diversity and not hierarchy (Department for Education 1992). It is to be hoped that those like Charles Glenn who expect more positive outcomes from choice policies in the United States are basing their optimism on a more realistic reading of their sociological context than their British counterparts.

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